

# THE VALLEY of the GIANTS

By PETER B. KYNE  
Author of "Cappy Ricks"

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"This is the first I've heard about any franchise." Sam Perkins replied suspiciously. "Seems to me you been mighty secret about this job. How do I know this ain't a forgery?"

"Call up the mayor and ask him," Bryce suggested.

"I'll do that," quoth Mr. Perkins ponderously. "And in the meantime, don't do any more digging or rail-cutting." He hurried away to his automobile, leaving a lieutenant in charge of the squad.

"Also in the meantime, young man," Colonel Pennington announced, "you will pardon me if I take possession of my locomotive and flat cars. I observe you have finished unloading those rails."

"Help yourself, Colonel," Bryce replied with an assumption of heartiness he was far from feeling.

"Thank you so much, Cardigan." With the greatest good nature in life, Pennington climbed into the cab, reached for the bell-cord, and rang the bell vigorously.

Then he permitted himself a triumphant toot of the whistle, after which he threw off the air and gently opened the throttle. He was not a locomotive engineer but he had ridden in the cab of his own locomotive and felt quite confident of his ability in a pinch.

With a creak and a bump the train started, and the Colonel ran it slowly up until the locomotive stood on the tracks exactly where Buck Ogilvy had been cutting in his crossing; whereupon the Colonel locked the brakes, opened his exhaust, and blew the boiler down. And when the last ounce of steam had escaped, he descended and smilingly accosted Bryce Cardigan.

"That engine being my property," he announced, "I'll take the short end of any bet you care to make, young man, that it will sit on those tracks until your temporary franchise expires. Cut in your jump-crossing now, if you can, you whelp, and be d—d to you. I've got you blocked!"

"I rather imagine this nice gentleman has it on us, old dear," chirped Buck Ogilvy plaintively. "Well! We did our damndest, which angels can't do no more. Let us gather up our tools and go home, my son, for something tells me that if I hang around here I'll bust one of two things—this sleek scoundrel's gray head or one of my hellocos veins! Hello! Whom have we here?"

Bryce turned and found himself facing Shirley Sumner. Her tender lip was quivering, and the tears shone in her eyes like stars. He stared at her in silence.

"My friend," she murmured tremulously, "didn't I tell you I would not permit you to build the N. C. O.?"

He bowed his head in rage and shame at his defeat. Buck Ogilvy took him by the arm. "Bryce, old chap, this is one of those occasions

where silence is golden. Speak not, I'll do it for you. Miss Sumner," he continued, "and Colonel Pennington," favoring that triumphant rascal with an equally gracious bow, "we leave you in possession of the field—temporarily. However, if anybody should drive up in a hack and lean out and ask you, just tell him Buck Ogilvy has another trump tucked away in his kitmoan."

Bryce turned to go, but with a sudden impulse Shirley laid her hand on his arm—his left arm. "Bryce!" she murmured.

He lifted her hand gently from his forearm, led her to the front of the locomotive, and held her hand up to the headlight. Her fingers were crimson with blood.

"Your uncle's killer did that, Shirley," he said ironically. "It's only a slight flesh wound, but that is no fault of your sides. Toot-night."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be back Sunday forenoon. Good-by."

He hung up, went to his chauffeur's quarters over the garage, and roused the man out of bed. Then he returned quietly to his room, dressed and

packed a bag for his journey, left a brief note for Shirley notifying her of his departure, and started on his two hundred and fifty-mile trip over the mountains to the south. As his car sped through sleeping Sequoia and gained the open country, the Colonel's heart thrilled pleasurably. He held cards and spades, big and little casino, four aces and the Joker; therefore he knew he could sweep the board at his pleasure. And during his absence Shirley would have opportunity to cool off, while he would find time to formulate an argument to null her suspicions upon his return.

CHAPTER XVI.

Quite oblivious of her uncle's departure for San Francisco, Shirley lay awake throughout the remainder of the night, turning over and over in her mind the various aspects of the Cardigan-Pennington imbroglio. Of one thing she was quite certain; peace must be declared at all hazards. She realized that she had permitted matters to go too far. A revulsion of feeling toward her uncle, induced by the memory of Bryce Cardigan's blood on her white finger tips, convinced the girl that, at all hazards to her financial future, henceforth she and her uncle must tread separate paths. She had found him out at last, and because in her nature there was some of his own fixity of purpose, the resolution cost her no particular pang.

She had been obsessed of a desire, rather unusual in her sex, to see a fight worth while; she had planned to permit it to go to a knockout, to use Bryce Cardigan's language, because she believed Bryce Cardigan would be vanquished—and she had desired to see him smashed—but not beyond repair, for her joy in the conflict was to lie in the task of putting the pieces together afterward!

It was rather a relief, therefore, when the Imperturbable James handed her at breakfast the following note:

"Shirley Dear:

"After leaving you last night, I decided that in your present frame of mind my absence for a few days might tend to a calmer and clearer perception, on your part, of the necessary tactics which in a moment of desperation, I saw fit, with regret, to pursue last night. And in the hope that you will have attained your old attitude toward me before my return, I am leaving in the motor for San Francisco. Your terrible accusation has grieved me to such an extent that I do not feel equal to the task of confronting you until, in a more judicial frame of mind, you can truly absolve me of the charge of wishing to do away with young Cardigan.

"Your affectionate  
"UNCLE SETH."

Shirley's lip curled. With a rarer, keener intuition than she had hitherto manifested, she sensed the hypocrisy between the lines; she was not deceived.

"He has gone to San Francisco for more ammunition," she soliloquized.

"Very well, unkie-dunk! While you're away, I shall manufacture a few bombs myself."

After breakfast she left the house and walked to the intersection of B with Water street. Jules Rondeau and his crew of lumberjacks were there, and with two policemen guarded the crossing.

Shirley looked from the woods bully to the locomotive and back to Rondeau.

"Rondeau," she said, "Mr. Cardigan is a bad man to fight. You fought him once. Are you going to do it again?"

He nodded.

"By whose orders?"

"Mr. Sexton, she told me to do it."

"Well, Rondeau, some day I'll be boss of Laguna Grande and there'll be no more fighting," she replied, and passed on down B street to the office of the Cardigan Redwood Lumber company. Moira McTavish looked up as she entered.

"Where is he, dear?" Shirley asked.

"I must see him."

"In that office, Miss Shirley," Moira replied, and pointed to the door. Shirley stepped to the door, knocked, and then entered. Bryce Cardigan, seated at his desk, looked up as she came in. His left arm was in a sling, and he looked harassed and dejected.

"Don't get up, Bryce," she said as he attempted to rise. "I know you're quite exhausted. You look it." She sat down. "I'm so sorry," she said softly.

His dull glance brightened. "It doesn't amount to that, Shirley." And he snapped his fingers. "It throbs a little and it's stiff and sore, so I carry it in the sling. That helps a little. What did you want to see me about?"

"I wanted to tell you," said Shirley, "that—that last night's affair was not of my making." He smiled compassionately. "I—I can't bear to have you think I'd break my word and tell him."

"It never occurred to me that you had dealt me a hand from the bottom of the deck, Shirley. Please don't worry about it. Your uncle has had two private detectives watching Ogilvy and me."

And he left her standing, pale of face and trembling in the white glare of the headlight.

He walked to his car and climbed into it. Ogilvy remained merely long enough to give orders to the foreman to gather up the tools, store them in the machine-shop of Cardigan's mill, and dismiss his gang; then he, too, entered the automobile, and at a word from Bryce, the car slid noiselessly away into the darkness. The track-cutting crew departed a few minutes later, and when Shirley found herself alone with her uncle, the tumult in her heart gave way to the tears she could no longer repress. Pennington stood by, watching her curiously, coldly.

Presently Shirley mastered her emotion and glanced toward him.

"Well, my dear?" he queried.

"I—I think I had better go home," she said without spirit.

"I think so, too," he answered. "Get into the mayor's silver, my dear, and I'll drive you. And perhaps the least said about this affair the better, Shirley. There are many things that you do not understand and which cannot be elucidated by discussion."

"I can understand an attempt at assassination, Uncle Seth."

"That blackguard Minorca! I should have known better than to put him on such a job. I told him to bluff and threaten; Cardigan, I knew, would realize the grudge the Black Minorca has against him, and for that reason I figured the greaser was the only man who could bluff him. While I gave him orders to shoot, I told him distinctly not to hit anybody. Good Lord, Shirley, surely you do not think I would wink at a murder!"

"I do," she answered passionately.

"With Bryce Cardigan out of the way you would have a clear field before you."

"Oh, my dear, my dear! Surely you do not realize what you are saying. You are beside yourself, Shirley. Please—please do not wound me so—so horribly. I am surrounded by enemies—the most implacable enemies. They force me to fight the devil with fire—and here you are, giving them aid and comfort!"

"I want you to defeat Bryce Cardigan, if you can do it fairly."

"At another time and in a calmer mood we will discuss that villain," he said authoritatively. "Get into the car, and we will go home. There is nothing more to be done tonight."

"Your sophistry does not alter my opinion," she replied firmly. "However, as you say, this is neither the time nor the place to discuss it."

They drove home in silence. Shirley went at once to her room. For the Colonel, however, the night's work had scarcely begun. The instant he heard the door to his niece's room shut, he went to the telephone and called up the Laguna Grande roundhouse. Sexton, his manager, answered.

"Have you sent the switch engine to the woods for Rondeau and his men?"

"Just left."

"Good! Now, then, Sexton, listen to me: As you know, this raid of Cardigan's has developed so suddenly I am more or less taken by surprise and have had no time to prepare the kind of counter-attack that will be most effective. However, with the crossing blocked, I gain time in which to organize—only there must be no weak point in the organization. In order to insure that, I am proceeding to San Francisco tonight by motor, via the coast road. I will arrive late tomorrow night, and early Saturday morning I will appear in the United States district court with our attorneys and file a complaint and petition for an order temporarily restraining the N. C. O. from cutting our tracks."

"I will have to make an affidavit to support the complaint, so I had better be Johnny-on-the-spot to do it, rather than risk the delay of making the affidavit tomorrow morning here and forwarding it by mail to our attorneys. The judge will sign a restraining order, returnable in from ten to thirty days—I'll try for thirty, because that will knock out the N. C. O.'s temporary franchise—and after I have obtained the restraining order, I will have the United States marshal telegraph it to Ogilvy and Cardigan."

"Bully!" cried Sexton heartily. "That will fix their clock."

"In the meantime," Pennington continued, "logs will be glutting our landings. We need that locomotive for its legitimate purposes. Take all that discarded machinery and the old boiler we removed from the mill last fall, dump it on the tracks at the crossing, and get the locomotive back on its run. Understand? The other side, having no means of removing these heavy obstructions, will be blocked until I return; by that time the matter will be in the district court, Cardigan will be hung up until his temporary franchise expires—and the city council will not renew it. Get me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be back Sunday forenoon. Good-by."

He hung up, went to his chauffeur's quarters over the garage, and roused the man out of bed. Then he returned quietly to his room, dressed and

packed a bag for his journey, left a brief note for Shirley notifying her of his departure, and started on his two hundred and fifty-mile trip over the mountains to the south. As his car sped through sleeping Sequoia and gained the open country, the Colonel's heart thrilled pleasurably. He held cards and spades, big and little casino, four aces and the Joker; therefore he knew he could sweep the board at his pleasure. And during his absence Shirley would have opportunity to cool off, while he would find time to formulate an argument to null her suspicions upon his return.

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"It never occurred to me that you had dealt me a hand from the bottom of the deck, Shirley. Please don't worry about it. Your uncle has had two private detectives watching Ogilvy and me."

"Oh!" she breathed, much relieved. A ghost of the old bantering smile lighted her winsome features. "Well, then," she challenged, "I suppose you don't hate me."

"On the contrary, I love you," he answered. "However, since you must have known this for some time past, I suppose it is superfluous to mention it. Moreover, I haven't the right—yet."

She had cast her eyes down modestly. She raised them now and looked at him searchingly. "I suppose you'll acknowledge yourself whipped at last, Bryce?" she ventured.

"Would it please you to have me surrender?" He was very serious.

"Indeed it would, Bryce. I'm tired of fighting. I want peace. I'm—I'm afraid to let this matter go any further. I'm truly afraid."

"I think I want peace, too," he answered. "I'd be glad to quit—with honor. And I'll do it, too, if you can induce your uncle to give me the kind of logging contract I want with his road."

"I couldn't do that, Bryce. He has you whipped—and he is not merciful to the fallen. You'll have to sur-

render unconditionally." Again she laid her little hand timidly on his wounded forearm. "Please give up, Bryce—for my sake."

"I suppose I'll have to," he murmured sadly. "I dare say you're right, though one should never admit defeat until he is counted out. I suppose," he continued bitterly, "your uncle is in high feather this morning."

"I don't know, Bryce. He left in his motor for San Francisco about one o'clock this morning."

For an instant Bryce Cardigan stared at her; then a slow, mocking little smile crept around the corners of his mouth, and his eyes lighted with mirth.

"Glorious news, my dear Shirley, perfectly glorious! So the old fox has gone to San Francisco, eh? Left in a hurry and via the overland route! Couldn't wait for the regular passenger-steamers tomorrow, eh? Great Jumping Jehoshaphat! He must have had important business to attend to. And Bryce commenced to chuckle.

"Oh, the poor old Colonel," he continued presently, "the dear old pirate! What a horrible right swing he's running into! And you want me to acknowledge defeat! My dear girl, in the language of the classic, there is nothing doing. I shall put in my crossing Sunday morning, and if you don't believe it, drop around and see me in action."

"You mustn't try," protested Shirley.

"Rondeau is there with his crew—and he has orders to stop you. Besides, you can't expect help from the police. Uncle Seth has made a deal with the mayor. I came prepared to suggest a compromise, Bryce," she declared, but he interrupted her with a wave of his hand.

"That for the police and that venal Mayor Poundstone!" Bryce retorted, with another snap of his fingers. "I'll rid the city of them at the fall election."

"You can't afford a compromise. You've been telling me I shall never build the N. C. O. because you will not permit me to. You're powerless, I tell you. I shall build it!"

"You shan't!" she fired back at him, and a spot of anger glowed in each cheek. "You're the most stubborn and belligerent man I have ever known. Sometimes I almost hate you."

"Come around at ten tomorrow morning and watch me put in the crossing—watch me give Rondeau and his gang the run." He reached over suddenly, lifted her hand, and kissed it. "How I love you, dear little antagonist!" he murmured.

"If you loved me, you wouldn't oppose me," she protested softly. "I tell

you again, Bryce, you make it very hard for me to be friendly with you."

"I don't want to be friendly with you. You're driving me crazy, Shirley. Please run along home, or wherever you're bound. I've tried to understand your peculiar code, but you're too deep for me; so let me go my way to the devil. George Sen Otter is outside asleep in the tonneau of the car. Tell him to drive you wherever you're going. I suppose you're afoot today, for I noticed the mayor riding to his office in your sedan this morning."

She tried to look outraged, but for the life of her she could not take offense at his bluntness; neither did she resent a look which she detected in his eyes, even though it told her he was laughing at her.

"Oh, very well," she replied with what dignity she could muster. "Have it your own way. I've tried to warn you. Thank you for your offer of the car. I shall be glad to use it. Uncle Seth sold my car to Mayor Poundstone last night. Mrs. P—admired it so!"

"Ah! Then it was that rascally Poundstone who told your uncle about the temporary franchise, thus arousing his suspicions to such an extent that when he heard his locomotive rumbling into town, he smelled a rat and hurried down to the crossing?"

"Possibly. The Poundstones dined at our house last night."

"Pretty hard on you, I should say. But then I suppose you have to play the game with Uncle Seth. Well, good morning, Shirley. Sorry to hurry you away, but you must remember we're on a strictly business basis—yet; and you mustn't waste my time."

"You're horrid, Bryce Cardigan."

"You're adorable. Good morning."

"You'll be sorry for this," she warned him. "Good morning." She passed out into the general office, visited with Moira about five minutes, and drove away in the Napier. Bryce watched her through the window. She knew he was watching her, but nevertheless she could not forbear turning round to verify her suspicions. When she did, he waved his sound arm at her, and she flushed with vexation.

"God bless her!" he murmured. "She's been my ally all along, and I never suspected it! I wonder what her game can be."

He sat musing for a long time. "Yes," he concluded presently, "old Poundstone has double-crossed us—and Pennington made it worth his while. And the Colonel sold the mayor his niece's automobile. It's worth twenty-five hundred dollars, at least, and since old Poundstone's finances will not permit such an extravagance, I'm wondering how Pennington expects him to pay for it. I smell a rat as big as a kangaroo. In this case two and two don't make four. They make six! Guess I'll build a fire under old Poundstone."

He took down the telephone receiver and called up the mayor. "Bryce Cardigan speaking. Mr. Poundstone," he greeted the chief executive of Sequoia.

"Oh, hello, Bryce, my boy." Poundstone boomed affably. "How's tricks?"

"So-so! I hear you've bought that sedan from Col. Pennington's niece. Wish I'd known it was for sale. I'd have outbid you. Want to make a profit on your bargain?"

"No, not this morning, Bryce. I think we'll keep it. Mrs. P—has been wanting a closed car for a long time, and when the Colonel offered me this one at a bargain, I snapped it